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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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NEW DELHI ALSO FOR DAO AND RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: COMMUNAL RIOTS CLOSE MANGALORE: PORT REMAINS OPEN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Four days of sporadic communal (Hindu-Muslim) clashes and the resulting curfew stopped most commercial activity from October 4 to 9 in the western Karnataka port city of Mangalore.

The conflict was sparked when militant Hindu groups attempted to prevent the transport of cattle for slaughter by Muslim traders. Local business people fault the state administration for allowing the violence to escalate. Mangalore's large port remained operational, however, despite a curfew imposed on the city by Karnataka state police. End Summary.

¶2. (U) An attempt during the night of October 4, 2006 by the Mangalore unit of the Bajrang Dal, a militant Hindu organization, to stop the transport of cattle for slaughter sparked four days of clashes in the port city. Violence left two Muslims dead and over 50 people injured, some grievously. Authorities in Dakshin Kanara district, where Mangalore is located, imposed a curfew. By Tuesday, October 10 the situation was sufficiently under control for the authorities to lift the curfew during daytime hours. B.S. Sial, Director General, Karnataka Police, told Post that over 120 individuals from both Hindu and Muslim communities are under arrest, and he expects the situation to return to normal within a few of days.

¶3. (U) Mangalore's large port remained operational despite the disturbances and curfew. P. Tamilvanan, Chairman, New Mangalore Port Trust (NMPT), told Post that port operations remained unaffected as the curfew zone excluded the port and associated township. Movement of cargo out of the port was disrupted, however, as day workers were unable to come to work. Rail movement remained unaffected, as did the port's oil terminal as the pipelines that move crude and finished petroleum products from Mangalore refinery remained operational during the curfew.

¶4. (U) The violence and ensuing curfew hit small business and day laborers hard. Households were particularly affected as prices of essentials shot up. Small business establishments were targets, with scores of shops reduced to ashes. District authorities valued the losses at around \$10,000, but the local chamber of commerce estimated losses at over \$500,000. Like NMPT, the other two large Mangalore-based businesses, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited and Mangalore Chemicals and Fertilizers were unaffected.

¶5. (U) According to contacts at the privately run Manipal Academy of Higher Education, located in the nearby city of Manipal, the Mangalore disturbances and curfew have not impacted on Manipal or the 15,000+ student university. Travelers to and from Manipal, where over 100 U.S. citizens study medicine and other subjects, are able to access the airport in Mangalore, the nearest one to Manipal.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Local business persons accuse the Karnataka government and the district administration of inaction, John

Menezes, President of Kanara Chamber of Commerce, told Post the situation could have been contained if the district administration had arrested all those involved in the clashes on the morning of October 5. It was not until October 7 that those involved were arrested, he claims. Coming soon after the October 4 Karnataka general strike (see Chennai 2284), the Mangalore clashes highlight the administrative weaknesses of Karnataka's fragile coalition government led by Chief Minister Kumarasamy. End Comment.

HOPPER